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ABSTRACT

This document analyzes the results of a follow-up study about specific factors that distinguish between students likely to drop out and those who stay in school and graduate. The dropout interview form, which was administered to dropouts in the original study, was revised and administered by counselors to 180 seniors who were in the lower four stanines, over age by 1 year or more, and yet described as likely to graduate. Although this in-school group had two of the characteristics proposed for local identification of potential dropouts, most of them did graduate. Analysis was done to identify the differences between the in-school group and the dropouts on the remainder of the survey characteristics, in order to determine the significant factors influencing dropping out. The following factors were explored: (1) the extent of the dropout problem; (2) family differences; (3) school performance; (4) reasons for dropping out; (5) response to structured reasons for dropping out; (6) differences in ratings of school problems; (7) differences in family problems; (8) differences in problems with work; (9) differences in court-related problems; and (10) differences in social causes. It was concluded that drop-outs: come from large families, with limited education; have poor classroom grades and poor attendance records; must work; and have problems with pregnancy, drugs, etc. Adult support can have a positive impact on potential dropouts. (JS)

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PROFILE OF STUDENTS AT RISK

During the last two weeks, new data has been received which improves our understanding of the specific factors which distinguish between students likely to drop out and those who stay in school and graduate. A revised version of the dropout interview form was administered by counselors to 180 seniors who were in the lower four stanines, overage by one year or more, and yet described as likely to graduate. This in-school group has the two characteristics proposed for local identification of potential dropouts, and yet most of them graduated. Differences between the in-school group and the dropouts on the remainder of the survey characteristics are likely to be factors which are potent influences on dropping out.

The total in-school groups (N=308) made up almost one out of every six graduates in 1986-87. Blacks were overrepresented in the in-school group (72%) as were males (58%). Black males, alone, made up 42% of the group. In the attached summary, documentation is presented relative to the extent of the dropout problem. Also provided is a listing of the important risk factors that show up in the differences between dropouts and the in-school group. The important findings are summarized below.

Family Differences

Important differences exist between the dropouts and the stay-ins. Dropouts come from larger families, and they are much more likely to have parents and siblings who are dropouts. Dropouts are more likely to have parents with limited education (eighth grade or less). It appears that the traditional nuclear family is less important--only 30% of the dropouts and stay-ins lived with both parents.

The data on the economic side--occupational level and earnings--show little difference between dropouts and stay-ins. (See Attachment p 2.)

School Performance

Grades are a better predictor of dropping out than standardized achievement test scores. The in-school group had much lower test scores than the dropouts but were making relatively average grades as seniors. Their attendance was about average for senior high school students (90%). In sharp contrast, three quarters of the dropouts were failing important subjects (English) and were attending only 67% of the time during their last full year in school.

Most of the dropouts (80%) and all of the in-school group had failed at least once. Dropouts were much more likely to have failed twice (16% vs 4%). A high proportion of the dropouts (78%) had failed in secondary school. In sharp contrast, 70% of the stay-ins had failed in elementary school.
(See Attachment pp 3 and 4.)

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Self-Report of Risk Factors

Poor attendance and failure in school are problems for a majority of dropouts. It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that these are the underlying risk factors. Low achievement could account for some 30% to 40% of dropouts. The in-school group proves that some students with low achievement scores can tolerate failure and still graduate. Very few of these students failed once they reached high school. Elementary grade failure does not appear to be as great a risk factor as late failure.

Twenty to twenty-five percent of the dropouts were doing reasonably well in school. They were attending regularly and were not failing when they dropped out. Pregnancy explains a sizable proportion of this population. Indeed, pregnancy is the risk factor for about half of the female dropouts. Ninety percent of these young women do not return to school after the birth of their babies.

The demands of work, or the need to work is a risk factor more commonly mentioned by males. For the 40% of dropouts who work, the long work hours are a risk factor. Half of these students are working virtually full time (36 hours) and trying to keep up with their school work. Work responsibilities alone could be the important risk factor for 25% of dropouts.

However, most dropouts do not drop out for a single reason. The accumulation of risk factors, as one author asked, "How many hits can a student take?" leads to dropping out. The risk factors at the bottom of the list are not less important--only less frequent. (See Attachment p 5.)

The responses of the dropouts and the in-school groups to the structured list of dropout causes underline the importance of a very short list of risk factors. On 80% of the items, the in-school group reported more problems than the dropouts. This may not be surprising, since they were still in school and were being reminded of them. There were no items about work, about family problems, or about medical problems which were selected as important problems by a higher proportion of dropouts. (See Attachment pp 5-7.)

The same can be said of the school problems, with one exception. The stay-ins were more likely to report problems with teachers, dislike of classes, and problems with other students. The only exception was on the perception that, "Teacher/principal has it in for me." Dropouts were much more likely to feel that they were a target of special attention by a member of the staff.

Dropouts also reported much larger problems with pregnancy, with child care, and with involvement with drugs and alcohol. The stay-ins were more likely to avoid these problems.

One question was asked of the in-school group that could not be asked of dropouts, "What kept you in school?" Thirty-two percent said parents, and another 19% said other adults. Only six percent responded teachers or counselors. I believe that this indicates the impact that adult support can have on potential dropouts. The other reasons given for staying in (the diploma, for myself, need education for work, want more out of life, my future, etc.) show a more mature outlook, a more goal-oriented viewpoint. Whether schools can influence this I don't know, but it would be worth trying.

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September 22, 1987

Extent of the Dropout Problem	Comments
Number of Dropouts Each Year:	1750 (1450 for the first time, 300 for the second or third time).
By Gender:	Fifty-five percent male, 45% female. This is very near the national figure.
By Race:	Fifteen percent higher for whites than blacks. White students drop out earlier in Cincinnati.
By Grade:	A higher number of students drop out at ninth grade (427/year). A higher percentage of students drop out at twelfth grade (12.7%--341). At twelfth grade this is 40% higher than it was five years ago.
By Age:	The average dropout was 18.0 years old when he/she dropped out. The average graduate was 18.6 years old. Twenty percent of the dropouts spent 13 or 14 years in school but did not receive a diploma.
Return to School:	Each year about 300 dropouts return to school--only ten of these students will succeed and later graduate.
Private and Parochial School Students:	Each year about 125 private school students enter the Cincinnati Schools and drop out before completing the school year.

5-Year Average		
Dropouts	No.	%
7	70	1.7%
8	92	2.3
9	427	9.3
10	414	11.1
11	329	10.2
12	341	12.7

Family Differences			Comments
Living with:			
	Dropouts	In School	No difference in the composition of the families. Only 30% or so of both groups live with their mother and father.
Both Parents	29%	30%	
Mother	52%	54%	
Father	4%	2%	
Other	15%	14%	
Mother's Education:			
Grade	Dropouts	In School	The stay-ins were much less likely to have parents with only an eighth grade education.
8 or bel.	14%	8%	
11 or bel.	51%	34%	
12 or abv.	35%	58%	
Father's Education:			
Grade	Dropouts	In School	The stay-ins were twice as likely to have parents who attended school for 12 years.
8 or bel.	20%	5%	
11 or bel.	51%	32%	
12 or abv.	29%	63%	
			Over half of the dropouts had parents who were dropouts.
Family Size: (number of children)			
	Dropouts	In School	Dropouts tended to come from larger families. Fifty percent more children.
	4.8 children	3.2 children	
Percent of Respondents with Another Dropout in the Family:			
	Dropouts	In School	Dropouts were more than twice as likely to have another dropout in the family.
	37%	14%	

School Performance

Comments

School Failure:

	% Overage
Dropouts	80%
Stay-ins	100%

The in-school group was selected to be one or more years behind.

Dropouts were more likely to have failed twice (16% vs 5%).

Dropouts were much more likely to have failed in high school (47% vs 14%) and in middle school (31% vs 16%). Most stay-ins failed in the elementary grades (70%).

Discipline Record:

	Suspended	Expelled
Dropouts	66%	11%
Stay-ins	49%	4%
Average No.	3	1

A higher percentage of dropouts had been suspended (66% vs 49%), and for more times (3 vs 1).

A higher percentage of dropouts had been expelled. (11% vs 4%).

Achievement:

	Reading Dropouts	Reading In School
Bel. Avg.	30%	58%
Avg.	62%	42%
Abv. Avg.	8%	0%

The in-school group was selected to be in stanines 1-4. Only 30% of the dropouts were in the below average range, compared to 58% of the stay-ins. Cincinnati dropouts have higher achievement scores than those reported nationally (34th percentile vs 27th percentile).

Final Grade in English:

	Percentage of Failures
Dropouts	74%
Stay-ins	11%

During their last full year in school, dropouts failed English at a much higher rate than the stay-ins.

School Performance (Cont.)

Comments

Absence in English Class:

	Average Absence
Dropouts	59 days/178
Stayins	18 days/178

The in-school groups matched the system average attendance in senior high school ($\approx$ 90%). The dropouts were absent one third of the time.

Believe School was Preparing Them for Real World:

Dropouts	In School
73%	89%

Participated in Extracurriculars:

	Dropouts	In School
Yes	39%	49%

Reasons for Dropping Out

Comments

Self-Reported Reasons for Dropping Out:
(Dropouts Only)

Pregnancy/Child Care/Marriage	25%
Failure/Overage/Low Grades	20%
Work (all mentions)	20%
Dislike for School	17%
Attendance	11%
Delinquency (out-of-school)	6%
Family Problems	6%
Suspension/Expulsion	4%
Illness/Health	4%
Drugs/Alcohol	3%
Other Students	3%

On the average, the dropouts gave 1.5 reasons from this list. There are multiple reasons for dropping out, and they occur in all combinations. The reasons at the bottom of the list are not less important—only less frequent.

About 20%-25% of the dropouts were doing reasonably well in school (passing, attending regularly) when they dropped out. These will be very hard to predict in advance.

Response to Structured Reasons for Dropping Out

Both the dropouts and the in-school group responded to a list of 40 problems. The former as reasons for dropping out, the latter as problems they had experienced in school.

The in-school group reported more problems than the dropouts. This was especially true in the areas of School Problems, Work and Family Problems. The exceptions are noted below.

Differences in Ratings of School Problems

Items Rated as Greater Problem by Dropouts:

Teacher/principal had it in for me.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	72%	89%
some cause/problem	16%	9%
important cause/problem	12%	2%

Since the in-school group rated most other problems as more important than the dropouts, the sense of being persecuted by a teacher/administrator is an important feature in dropping out for some students.

Differences in Family Problems

Comments

The in-school group reported more problems on all family items.

Differences in Problems with Work

Can't get a part time job.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	86%	66%
some cause/problem	11%	8%
important cause/problem	4%	25%

The stay-ins were not asked whether they had a job (oversight). Their responses suggest that fewer of them were working. This may be one of the reasons why they stayed in school.

Can't work and study at the same time.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	81%	51%
some cause/problem	14%	29%
important cause/problem	5%	20%

Differences in Court Related Problems

In trouble outside of school.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	78%	92%
some cause/problem	10%	5%
important cause/problem	12%	3%

The dropouts reported more problems on all of the court related causes.

Arrested?

	Dropouts	In School
Yes	36%	15%
No	64%	85%

Serious delinquency problems appear to be a major cause of dropping out.

Institutionalized?

	Dropouts	In School
Yes	21%	4%
No	79%	96%

Differences in Social Causes

Got pregnant.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	78%	93%
some cause/problem	2%	0%
important cause/problem	20%	7%

Problem finding child care.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	81%	97%
some cause/problem	5%	2%
important cause/problem	14%	1%

Problem with drugs.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	90%	98%
some cause/problem	6%	1%
important cause/problem	5%	1%

Problem with alcohol.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	89%	96%
some cause/problem	7%	2%
important cause/problem	5%	1%

Social life more important than school work.

	Dropouts	In School
no cause/problem	69%	69%
some cause/problem	22%	29%
important cause/problem	9%	2%

Comments

On all of the social causes, more dropouts reported important problems. It appears that a major distinction between dropouts and students who stay in is that the latter manages to avoid delinquency, pregnancy, and problems with drugs and alcohol.